

VZCZCXRO6081
PP RUEHDBU RUEHROV
DE RUEHMO #1139/01 1250456
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
P 050456Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY MOSCOW
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3137
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHXD/MOSCOW POLITICAL COLLECTIVE

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MOSCOW 001139

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/05/2019
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [OFDP](#) [IS](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: MOSCOW ON ISRAELI FOREIGN MINISTER LIEBERMAN

REF: A. MOSCOW 896
[1](#)B. 08 MOSCOW 1991

Classified By: Ambassador John Beyrle for reasons 1.4 (b/d).

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: MFA officials look forward to working with Israeli Foreign Minister Lieberman, who they believe may be more pragmatic on the peace process than his typically harsh rhetoric suggests. They remain unsure, however, just how large a role he will have in formulating key policy decisions regarding Israeli security. MFA officials feel comfortable dealing with the Russian-speaking Lieberman, who is considered by some to act more Russian than Israeli. Observers point out, however, that Lieberman left the Soviet Union in 1978 (from Moldova, where he grew up), and his actual ties to Russia are limited. They do not believe he is well connected to Moscow's ruling elite, nor to Russia's Jewish community. If Lieberman follows through on his statement to elevate already strong Russia-Israel ties, this would prove a success for the GOR goal of benefiting politically from the Russian-speaking diaspora. Observers contend that the GOR had hoped to have real influence within this large and diverse community, but, in the case of Israel, has settled on enjoying the soft power it has given Russia through close cultural ties. End summary.

Lieberman Will Be Pragmatic

[1](#)2. (C) MFA officials have assessed Lieberman as more pragmatic than his often harsh rhetoric regarding the Palestinians and neighboring Arab states suggests. DFM Saltanov told Ambassador Beyrle that Lieberman had given contradictory signals, stating that he would dismantle his house in the West Bank for the sake of peace while issuing harsh comments about Israeli Arabs. In Saltanov's assessment, however, National Security Advisor Uzi Arad was likely to play a more decisive role in Israeli MEPP policy formulation than Lieberman (ref A). Counselor in the MFA peace process office Timur Zabiroy offered a similar assessment, in which Lieberman would not play a significant part in key security issues. He thought Lieberman's business and organizational skills more suited to a different government ministry, but understood that the Yisrael Beiteinu (YB) party leader was given the Foreign Ministry because he wanted to sit on Netanyahu's security council. Middle East and North Africa Department Director Sergey Vershinin commented that while Arad and other advisors to Netanyahu were expected to play a significant role formulating foreign policy, it was important to remember that they were not politicians like Lieberman who reflected the will of a significant part of the Israeli electorate. He thought Lieberman would be more pragmatic than his comments suggested, particularly after the rigors of governing tempered some of the FM's more extreme inclinations.

He Acts Like a Russian

[1](#)3. (C) MFA officials have commented that Lieberman acts more

Russian than Israeli, providing a high level of comfort for working with him. Not only did Lieberman recently conduct an entire meeting with Saltanov in Russian, but, Saltanov joked to EU special representative for the Middle East Lotte, he was even allowed to smoke while visiting the Israeli Foreign Ministry. Israeli Ambassador Azeri told the Ambassador that the Russians consider Lieberman "their guy." They feel they know him; they like and understand his "aggressive" way of presenting his case. Middle East Studies Institute President Yevgeniy Satanovskiy warned not to get too carried away by Lieberman's Russianness, reminding us that the FM was from Moldova, not Russia, and left the Soviet Union in 1978 when he was only 20.

Not Plugged in to Moscow

14. (C) Satanovskiy, who, as a founder and former President of the Russian-Jewish Congress is intimate with the Moscow-Tel Aviv nexus, told us that he was acquainted with Lieberman but did not believe that the Israeli FM had strong affiliations with Moscow's ruling elite. He was unaware of any formal links between Russia and Lieberman's YB party. Satanovskiy did not consider Lieberman particularly well plugged in to Moscow's Jewish community. Rather, he saw Lieberman as part of a large "circle" of Russian-speaking Jews who traveled easily between Russia, Israel, the U.S., UK, and Germany for personal and business reasons. Contacts were facilitated by organizations such as the Moscow-based Russian Jewish Congress and less formal associations between people in the Russian-speaking communities in each country.

MOSCOW 00001139 002 OF 002

15. (C) Satanovskiy said that despite the attention given in the Russian press to Lieberman's comments that he wanted to raise Russia-Israel ties to that of a strategic partnership, he did not believe the Israeli FM was pursuing a special Russian agenda. Furthermore, Lieberman's YB party should not be considered a "Russian party," as the FM's political success demonstrated an ability to integrate into Israel's Hebrew-speaking establishment.

The Russian-Speaking Jewish Diaspora

16. (C) Leonard Terlitskiy, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society's representative in the CIS, agreed with Satanovskiy's assessment of Lieberman's limited ties to Moscow, as well as his description of the Russian-speaking Jewish diaspora. Terlitskiy said that if Lieberman succeeded in elevating the already strong relations Russia enjoyed with Israel, it would accomplish the GOR goal of benefiting politically from the Russian "compatriots abroad." This did not mean that Lieberman was Moscow's man in Israel, nor that the GOR had a fifth column among Russian-speaking Jews. Terlitskiy explained that the GOR had attempted to exert some influence on this population in Israel, and the Kremlin played a role in the formation of the Federation of Russian Jews, a rival organization to the Russian-Jewish Congress. He believed, however, that the GOR had not seen the success it had hoped for in influencing the Russian-speaking Jewish diaspora, and was content to allow it to serve as an element of Russia's soft power. In the case of Israel, this has paid off in the form of cultural bonds that have translated into growing political and economic ties (ref B).

BEYRLE